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Schools to breed future Olympians

Athletes, excited and hopeful, come in droves for the year's staging of the biggest sporting event in the country – the 2009 Palarong Pambansa. And this year, the Paloro makes full use of information and communications technology (ICT) to keep the public posted on the games results.

Some 15,000 athletes and school officials from public and private elementary and secondary schools vie and cheer their region's delegation in 18 events. The refurbished Leyte Sports Development Center (LSDC) in Tacloban City, Leyte plays host in the event, which runs from April 27 to May 3, 2009.

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo will meet with the delegation as she tabled the holding of the cabinet meeting in the province.

The Department of Education is in charge of the annual staging of the Palarong Pambansa in partnership with the province of Leyte, local government units and other agencies like the Philippine Sports Commission and the National Sports Associations.

The Department expects a much improved wireless reporting of every sporting event including the real time and on-line broadcast of events and results this year. SMART Communications provided 18 SMART Bro mobile kits for this.

Education Secretary Jesli Lapus disclosed that: "The buzz word for this year's event is 'from the lap to the top' which means swift and efficient posting of games results."

The results of the games can be seen through a special DepEd website: <http://depedtfss.wikispaces.com>.

At the same time Lapus announced various innovations and new events this year which include boxing for elementary students, arnis for female athletes in secondary, and exhibition games in football by the national team.

Lapus said, "Whatever is the latest in the international standards is applied in the Paloro. We will continue to raise the level of competition as well as the management of the Paloro because it is the international arena that we should focus on. Let our goal be the Olympics."

He said, "We should start developing future Manny Pacquiao, Lydia de Vegas, and Elma Muros'. Let us start them young, so we can have a deep bench of future champions."

“To ensure safety of our athletes, particularly in contact sports, the sports equipment we use follow international standards,” he stressed.

“Sports is for all,” pointed Lapus, “so we have organized special events for students with special talents.” These events include dance sports and special games for those who are differently-abled.

The Palarong Pambansa serves as the culmination of the sporting events, which take place first in schools then districts, divisions or provinces and regions.

Sport events in high school level include: archery, arnis, athletics, badminton, basketball, baseball, boxing, chess, football, gymnastics, sepak takraw, softball, swimming, table tennis, taekwondo, tennis and volleyball.

Elementary students will compete in the following events: athletics, badminton, basketball, baseball, boxing, chess, football, gymnastics, sipa, softball, swimming, table tennis, taekwondo, tennis and volleyball.

DepEd assures a much improved staging and management of the Palarong Pambansa. “If last year we did a good job, this year we will do even better,” Lapus stressed.

Len Toledo, Secretary-General of Palarong Pambansa affirmed, “We have to develop athletes particularly in sports where we are good at.”

Sports can also serve as a motivating factor for students to stay in schools, according to Toledo. “We observe that students go to schools where they can learn and play,” he noted.

“Children stay where they can learn and play,” is DepEd’s battle cry according Lapus. “Sports attract children to study and thus increase retention and reduce the drop out rate.”

The province of Leyte hosts this year’s Palaro. Tacloban City last hosted the national games in 1983.

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